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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 RANGOON 001425

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [BM](#) [IN](#)

SUBJECT: INDIAN AMBASSADOR RATES THAN SHWE VISIT AN
"IMPORTANT SUCCESS"

REF: A. NEW DELHI 6983 AND PREVIOUS (NOTAL)

[1](#)B. SECSTATE 225960 AND PREVIOUS (NOTAL)

[1](#)C. RANGOON 1374 AND PREVIOUS

[1](#)D. 03 RANGOON 1452

Classified By: COM Carmen Martinez for Reasons 1.4 (b,d)

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: India's Ambassador to Burma concludes that the SPDC Chairman's October 24-29 visit to India was "a very important success" that addressed Burma's domestic situation, secured GOB support for an Indian UNSC seat, and yielded progress on bilateral security and trade issues. The Ambassador acknowledges an important role for ASSK and the NLD, but believes that the party's importance will diminish if it can't influence the political situation. Citing recent high-level meetings in Washington, the Ambassador viewed the U.S. as accepting that India's Burma policy has higher priorities than democracy and human rights. Despite GOI assurances that India pressed Than Shwe to make forward movement on democracy (including freeing ASSK), we see no signs in Rangoon that the Indian Government intends to pursue these issues in any meaningful way with the Burmese regime. End Summary.

[1](#)2. (C) On November 3, COM and P/E Chief called on the Indian Ambassador to Burma, Rajiv Kumar Bhatia, to discuss SPDC Chairman Senior General Than Shwe's October 24-29 visit to India. Ambassador Bhatia was closely involved in the planning for the visit and participated in most events during the trip. According to Bhatia, Monday October 25 was essentially "Myanmar Day" in New Delhi as a "significant portion" of the GOI was devoted to Than Shwe's schedule as well as to numerous bilateral meetings conducted with the eight Burmese ministers and two junta members who were part of the delegation.

[1](#)3. (C) The COM raised the joint India-Burma statement issued upon conclusion of the visit and inquired how and when the language had been negotiated. Bhatia said he "would not question the wisdom" of his headquarters on this issue and demurred when asked if the text had been agreed upon prior to the trip, but intimated that this was probably the case. Bhatia described the statement's language on democracy as one of the most important aspects of the trip, particularly when viewed in the context of Former Defense Minister Fernandes' parallel conference on Burma and the concurrent visit of UN Special Envoy to Burma Razali. "Allowing such events to occur during the visit of a head of state shows the flexibility of the Indian system," said Bhatia. When the COM noted that the GOI had refused a visa for NCGUB "Prime Minister-in-exile" Sein Win to attend the Fernandes event, Bhatia replied "We only denied one person, and we have consistently denied entry to that person for the past 15 years."

[1](#)4. (C) Bhatia said that from the GOI's perspective, Than Shwe and his delegation successfully demonstrated that the Burmese regime is "determined and sincere about effecting a transition to democracy." However, he said, the GOB makes a compelling case that stability and economic development must be achieved before the regime hands over power. The COM replied that the SPDC shows no desire to relinquish control and, in the absence of a timeline or freedom for democracy leaders, the "road map" lacks any credibility. The COM also observed that official SPDC media photos of Burmese Embassy staff in New Delhi prostrating themselves on the ground before Than Shwe (a custom that does not exist in Burma) was symbolic of the broad control over the Burmese people that the generals seek to gain and maintain.

[1](#)5. (C) The COM noted reports that the GOI views Aung San Suu Kyi and the NLD as having lost their opportunity to effect political change (ref A). Bhatia (who claims to "stay in touch" with the NLD) was less dismissive, saying that the "ASSK and NLD dimension" is an important one and acknowledging that ASSK still enjoys immense popularity among the Burmese people. He insisted that the GOI had "very clearly" raised the ongoing detention of the NLD leadership with Than Shwe (but added that ASSK's international influence seems to grow the longer she is in detention, suggesting that house arrest is helpful to the democracy leader). However, Bhatia said, the key issue for the NLD will be the party's

ability to marshal support and influence the political process; if the NLD can't influence, then its importance will be diminished. The COM replied that it is unrealistic to put the onus on the NLD while the party's leaders are still in detention, observing that "all SPDC promises about a transition ring hollow if ASSK and U Tin Oo are not freed."

16. (C) Ambassador Bhatia concluded that the Than Shwe visit was "a very important success" that had addressed Burma's domestic situation, secured GOB support for an Indian seat at the UN Security Council, and yielded progress on bilateral security and trade issues. He added that as a result of recent senior-level meetings at the NSC and elsewhere in Washington, the GOI had concluded that "the United States now has a much better understanding of India's perspective on, and policy toward, Myanmar" -- suggesting that he believes the U.S. accepts that India has higher priorities than democracy and human in dealing with Burma. The COM immediately reiterated that GOB promises mean nothing unless ASSK is freed, the NLD is allowed to play a meaningful role, and there is a credible timeline for next steps.

17. (C) Comment: Ambassador Bhatia, as well as others in New Delhi (ref A), gave assurances that India pressed Than Shwe to make forward movement on democracy and human rights (including freeing ASSK). However, we see no signs in Rangoon that the Indian Government intends to pursue these issues in any meaningful way with the Burmese regime. Vice President Shekhawat's 2003 visit to Burma (ref D) was the beginning of an ongoing charm offensive that has only the thinnest veneer of support for democratization. According to senior NLD officials in Rangoon, no Indian official, or even locally-based Indian diplomat, has attended an NLD function or visited an NLD office in nearly 16 years. The October 29 joint statement envisions reciprocal visits by President Kalam and Prime Minister Singh to Burma (and a visit by new Burmese PM Soe Win to India). By all appearances, the GOI's security and economic goals will likely dominate such prime opportunities to press the SPDC to make meaningful political changes. End Comment.
Martinez